Braided Essay

EDCI 5444

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August Is the Sun

I.

August is the sun and everyone else is a planet revolving around him. If you can overcome the world you can overcome the universe. In all the universe, why does this boy choose Boba Fett? Because he wears a mask, and his face is never revealed. Darth Vader—even his face is revealed, and it is quite unpleasant. When we unmask him he is weak, emasculated. But Boba Fett—we are not given the privilege of seeing his face. He is untouchable. Fett is a rogue, and yet all the Star Wars fandom universe shifts from Luke Skywalker to him, a minor character. It is Fett who fetches a high price at toy auctions, Fett who all the kids want to be for Halloween.

II.

Sticks:Stones:Metal:Flesh

Cold iron at my back rings hollow as my heart.

My spine curves,

question with no answer.

Words fill me,

water in a lung

different

loser

weird

retarded

gay

go away

I hate you

The bag in my hand holds

the

end

of

it

all

III.

What if I whenever I shut my eyes, I became a *different* version of myself. My eyes would drop low on my face, slipping down like wax on a candlestick. And my nose--what if it flattened or disappeared entirely? A lump of pancake batter flattening on skillet. A small chiseled hole pecked into the side of tree. I picture my mouth swallowing my lips and my teeth shrinking, shrinking, shrinking till they disappear.

But *I* would still be the same. My insides wouldn’t change or alter. My thoughts and dreams, my internal freckles, are bright and untarnished. I worry no one would see me, hear me, speak to me. Would my family kiss me on the cheek? Would my friends be what they were?

I can see the light shining through my eyelids and I crack them open. My features slip and slide back into place. The world shifts into my normal, but I continue to wonder. Wonder how my life would be *different.* Better? Worse? I almost wish I could put on a mask and see. Try, but not keep. And stop wonder.

IV.

“Each second we live is a new and unique moment of the universe, a moment that will never be again And what do we teach our children? We teach them that two and two make four, and that Paris is the capital of France. When will we also teach them what they are?

We should say to each of them: Do you know what you are? You are a marvel. You are unique. In all the years that have passed, there has never been another child like you. “----Pablo Casals

I have faithfully moved this quote from classroom to classroom, printed and reprinted it, written it out by hand, posted it on corkboards, on classroom doors, over my desks, even threatened to get it tattooed on my skin, a permanent reminder of what I believe to be true. I have been paid to teach children the mechanics of language, the mysteries of literature and poetry...but what I hope I teach them is simply that they are unique, irreplaceable and intrinsically priceless.

V.

*8th grade new kid.* I look down at my uniform and wince. My skirt is a loud blue plaid and my shirt is a clingy white cotton polo. I can feel the sweat bead already on my back and wonder if it’s showing through the shirt. My eyes travel to my shoes. Clunkers. Big, black bricks encasing my toes. I feel awkward.

The teacher begins to call roll and I wait for my name. She moves quickly down the list, glancing up occasionally to greet familiar faces. Nearly everyone talks around me. She pauses and I know she’s reached my name, and I wait for her to look up and scan the room. I raise my hand to make it easier on her. Welcome, she says, and sends me a reassuring smile.

She has everyone introduce themselves and I find out I am one of only two new people in the class. Everyone else has known each other for years. Somehow their shoes seem less clunky, their plaids less obnoxious. I sit back in my chair and watch.

VI.

August is the sun, and everyone else is a planet revolving around him. Without the sun, planets are not held in their solar systems. The interaction of the solar nebula and the solar wind shapes planets in a solar system. Each planet is a unique result of distance from the sun, solar nebula particles and solar wind. Planets in a system act on each other as they form, affecting each other in many ways including gravitational pull. In another solar system, around another sun, with a different environment, different planets would form. Each one is a unique combination of interaction with parent, siblings and universe.

Each interaction we have with others is a unique moment in the universe. Once it has passed, it is gone forever. What do we do with those moments? How can we create meaningful moments as the universe is created and destroyed around us millions of times every day?

VII.

My universe was created and destroyed when I went to camp, like a lamb to the slaughter. I wish I had the mystique of a faceless man encased in armor, invulnerable. Instead I wore glasses and an orthodontic night brace. I felt like Plo Koon, Vader after his mask was removed, a weak and pale monstrosity. Mock me. Punch me. Spit in my face. I write in my journal superficial relays of the day’s activities, not daring to let readers see my pain. The universe was not kind to some of these kids. They are pulled into one another’s orbits. The rest of us are drifting moons, finding one another in a solar hollow.

The counselors feel the shift one night. They flip on the lights and make everyone do pushups. Everyone except me and the drifting moons. I’m smiling as I watch them. It was a necessary kindness, and when I think on that week I feel I took an orbit around the sun, having aged in the light and shadow of its presence. The universe took care of its birds that night.